

[Early Horticultural History and Lore]

Form A

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date January 30, 1939.

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Early Horticultural History and Lore.

Name and address of informant Mrs. Herman Ledding 2105 Harrison St., Milwaukie, Oregon.

Date and time of interview 2:00 to 3:15 P.M., Jan. 26, 1939.

Place of interview 2105 Harrison St., Milwaukie, Oregon.

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

Mrs. Oatfield, Oatfield Rd., Oak Grove, Oregon.

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you —

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Library of Congress

A living-room, or perhaps more properly, a library, the walls of which were lined with books, with books and magazines lying on comfortable arm chairs, couches and tables. A room that reflected its occupants — people who delve into all manner of literature, old and new, with a leaning toward economic and political problems; people who like to express themselves also. The many small-paned windows were without shades or draperies, permitting all the light possible on a dark day. A bright fire burned in the fireplace, and a few interesting pictures hung on the walls.

The house, while not new, was of the better sort of architecture, somewhat formal in type, of two stories, with roofless porches or terraces surrounding it.

2

About the building, with its separate garage, was much shrubbery, a dominate feature of which were the gorgeous camelias, just coming into blossom. The grounds embraced about a block, the lawns sloping down from the house. Across one corner ran a small stone-walled brook. Public buildings — a junior high school among them — with spacious green lawns, afforded an air of space and repose to the neighborhood.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date January 30, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Library of Congress

Subject Early Horticultural History and Lore.

Name and address of informant Mrs. Herman Ledding 2105 Harrison Streets Milwaukie, Oregon.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
 2. Place and date of birth
 3. Family
 4. Places lived in, with dates
 5. Education, with dates
 6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates
 7. Special skills end interests
 8. Community and religious activities
 9. Description of informant
 10. Other points gained in interview
1. Swedish-English, prior to the Revolution.
 2. North Platte, Neb., 1877.
 3. Father, Andrew Olson; step-father, Seth Lewelling; mother, Sophronia Vaughn Olson Lewelling.

Library of Congress

4. North Platte, Neb., 1877-1880; Carson City, Nevada, 1880-1881; Milwaukie, Oregon, 1881-1939.

5. Portland Public Schools; Convent of Sacred Heart, Vancouver, Wash.; St. Helen's Hall, Portland, Oregon; University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, 1896. Law School 1897.

6. Kindergarten work (learned under Kate Douglas Wiggin); Practiced law. For a year or so owned and operated the "Clackamas County Independent", a newspaper. First woman in the United States appointed as referee in bankruptcy. First secretary Oregon Democratic Legislative League.

2

7. Took an active part in securing woman suffrage in Oregon. Interested always in politics.

8. Not so much interested in small community matters as in questions of broader scope. Was at one time a member of Unitarian Church.

9. Large woman of aggressive type. Brown eyes, gray hair, and a rather smart dresser along conservative lines.

10. Clever and well educated. She is the sort of person to be treated with diplomacy. The term "inferiority complex" is not within her ken. Her husband, who was present at the interview, one would judge to be something of a student. He appeared to be somewhat younger than his wife.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date January 30, 1939

Address 506 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Subject Early Horticultural History and Lore.

Name and address of informant Mrs. Herman Ledding 2105 Harrison Street, Milwaukie, Oregon.

Text:

Oh, I'm afraid I can't tell you very much. I'm not a pioneer, you know, and neither were my peoples since we came here in 1881. Of course I am a step-daughter of Seth Lewelling, and I might be able to tell you a few little things regarding him and his early life here.

You passed the old house down on the corner, that is known as the Lewelling house, on your way here, did you not? The one with the big weeping willow tree? You perhaps already know that was built by Elisha Kellogg in 1851, and leased by him to a man named Noah Hablar, for use as a tavern. In 1852, when the Lewellings arrived, there wasn't a house to be had, and it was too late in the year for them to build. They were not poor, so finally they prevailed on Habler, whose lease ran another year, to let them move in his tavern, after which they hired him to work for them, and eventually they bought the house.

Oh, as to the various forms of spelling my stepfather's name. His ancestors originally came from Wales, where the family of Lewellyn, as it was then spelled was the head of the clan, with the royal prerogatives of that long ago period. Later, when the faith of the Quakers was embraced, it was considered seemly to adopt a simpler form, and the name was reduced to plain 2 "Lueling," Here in Oregon it was spelled "Luelling," by Henderson. After

Library of Congress

a misunderstanding between the two brothers, Seth and Henderson, Seth arrived at the spelling of "Lewelling" and that, I think, is the way the name is generally spelled today.

Here's a story in which you may be interested. I don't know just what year this occurred, but sometime in the early '60's, I think. Anyway the Lewelling Nursery had ordered a consignment of peach stones from somewhere in the eastern states, and the shipment was delivered and unloaded at Portland. Peach-growing in Oregon was as yet untried, so that this peach stone shipment was awaited with more than a little interest. Noah Habler, behind a safe team and a good, sound farm wagon, was sent to Portland after the peach stones. Now, Noah was a good ordinarily, but he was a bit fond of his fire-water. The first thing he did at Portland was to get loaded himself. After that he piled his bags of peach pits in the wagon, climbed to his seat, gathered up his "lines," clucked to his horses and jogged homeward. Finally, after an all-day's trip, and still a bit the worse for his liquor, he arrived at the nursery. The consignees came out to investigate their long-awaited shipment, only to find a practically empty wagon. Noah, it seemed, had overlooked replacing the wagon tailboard, the bags had jostled open, and, as was soon discovered, a trail of peach pits extended all along the muddy highway from Portland to Milwaukie, making it necessary to send another and more trustworthy man to follow along Noah's trail in pursuit of the elusive peach stones.

Another story my step-father was fond of relating is the one when he was taking a woman visitor through his nursery one day during the cherry season. They came to a tree where there were come particularly luscious cherries hanging just within reach. There were only a few of these cherries. The woman reached up, picked them, and all before my step-father had fully comprehended, had plopped them all into her mouth. She exclaimed over their exquisite flavor, and step-father, 3 with a somewhat wry smile, asked if she would kindly give him the pits, which she did. Afterwards he heard that the visitor said, "Why, that Seth Lewelling is the stingiest man I ever heard of. He asked me to give him the pits from a few cherries I ate in his old orchard." She did not see the string hanging on the particular branch of that tree, to show where the process of polonization had been effected a year

Library of Congress

before, and the result of which my step-father had been eagerly omitting all these months. Under the circumstances he was thankful he got the pits, since he had to take his visitor's word for the new fruit's taste.

I do not know if it is generally known, but according to the old timers, the channel of the Willamette river used to be along the east side of Rose Island in the early days. The sea-going vessels used to come into harbor loaded down with rock ballast, and Couch, of the Couch Donation land Claim at Portland, as it was said, would pay the captains and crew so much to dump their ballast between the island and the east shore of the river.

To get back to the Lewellings and their nursery, that the Bing cherry was named in honor of a Chinese workman, is fairly well known, but not much has been told about the Chinese himself. He was a northern Chinese, of the Manchou race, the men and women of which are large, and very unlike the usual Cantonese Chinese with which we are familiar. Bing was close to six feet tall, if not more, He was foreman of the gang of thirty or more Chinese usually working in the orchards, and he worked here on contract for some thirty years. But he had a family back in China, or at least he had a wife there, to whom he sent money regularly, and this wife had adopted six or seven boys, so that Bing was sure to have sons to provide for the traditional ancestor worship. Bing was always talking about his family, he wanted to go back and see his wife and sons. Finally in '89 or '90 he went, and while he was in China the Oriental exclusion law was passed, and Bing was never able to return 4 to the United States. He was very fond of the song, "Ol' Black Joe," which he would sing over and over again in a low minor key, Chinese fashion.

The manner in which the cherry was named for him happened thus: He and my step-father were working the trees, every other row each. When they discovered this tree with its wonderful new cherry, someone said, "Seth, you ought to name this for yourself," "I've already got one in my name," Seth responded (the Lewelling), "No, I'll name this for Bing. It's a big cherry and Bing's big, and any way it's in his row, so that shall be its name."

Library of Congress

The Lewelling cherry was a prize-winner at the Philadelphia Centennial Fair, or the Philadelphia International Exhibition, as it is named on the bronze medal, which we have. The cherry sold for a dollar a pound in Philadelphia that year.

The Lewellings were strong for the Union. In 1866 Ezra [Mocker?] worked during the winter for Seth, and when spring came Seth grub-staked him with 1500 one-year old trees, with which he left for Northern California and Nevada. Amongst these trees was one called the Lincoln cherry. Ezra Meaker must have sold trees to quite a number in Carson City, for on one of the old show places of that town there are Lincoln cherry trees still in existence and still bearing fruit — the only cherry tress of that name that do exist. Other fine fruit trees Seth Lewelling propagated, of which nothing is now known, was the golden prune — yellow with pink spots, and a pear, called "Mother's Favorite."

The first commercial prune orchard on the Pacific Coast was that of Seth Lewelling's, in 1857.

Form D

Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date January 30, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Subject Early Horticultural History and Lore.

Library of Congress

Name and address of informant Mrs. Herman Ledding 2105 Harrison St., Milwaukie, Oregon

Comment:

It is only fair to mention here that much of the actual data given was suggested by Mrs. Ledding's husband, who, however, requested that his name not appear on Form B.

Mrs. Ledding brought in and referred to a very interesting looking scrap book, but seemed averse to showing it to the interviewer. Experience reveals that old scrap books, with their wealth of old-time obituaries, etc., lead to more actual folklore and community history than almost any other source, especially in small country towns.